

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Flexer & Representative Fox, ranking members Senator Sampson and Representative France as well as the esteemed members of the GAE committee.

My name is Taylor Tucker, I am a Naval Veteran and current UConn School of Social Work graduate student with a focus in policy practice. I was born and raised in Connecticut and am currently a registered voter residing in West Hartford. I am writing to you today in support of H.B 6578 AN ACT CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. Voting is one of the core foundations to a strong democracy that supports and represents the voices and needs of ALL citizens. Voting is of such importance that it is even included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating that “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives”.

I think that Connecticut State Representative David Michel asks an important question, “What is the definition of being an American citizen? Normally, if you are American you have the right to vote. Are we removing citizenship for people who are punished for a crime they committed?” Voting is not only a basic human right, but the tangible act of voting is directly connected to positive outcomes for both individuals and their communities, which in turn is the community you are representing. We know that historically felony disenfranchisement laws were drafted into state legislation to explicitly restrict the political power of Black Americans and other significantly marginalized groups. The disproportionately higher rate of criminally incarcerated Black and POC individuals is glaringly evident today, this continues to systematically reduce access to voting and in turn the political power of these communities. (Hill et. al, 2020)

Communities who vote are significantly better off in essential ways, which include but are not limited to stronger social connections, better employment and an overall greater community well-being (Kansas Civic Health Foundation, 2016). Voting is also shown to increase connection with other community members as well as feeling a sense of positivity towards themselves and their contributions. According to the Florida Parole Commission study done in 2010, formerly incarcerated individuals who had their voting rights restored had a significantly lower recidivism rate. Currently Connecticut’s law on voting with a felony is the MOST punitive in New England. I strongly support expanding voting rights to those on parole like RI, MA, and NH but I strongly believe we should follow VT and ME in allowing ALL citizens to vote. We know based on VT and ME that this is not an impossible pipe dream and that it can be implemented with everyone’s voting freedoms at the center.

Thank you for your time and again I urge you to support the passing of H.B 6578 AN ACT CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS which would restore rightful voting rights to all of Connecticut’s citizens. I would like to leave you all with a question: is a democracy truly representative of all people if not everyone is able to vote?

I would also like to put on record that I am submitting my support for the following other bills being heard today (10 March 2021)

- SB 753 An Act Concerning The Counting Of Incarcerated Persons For Purposes Of Determining Legislative Districts
- HB 5312 An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to Convicted Felons Who Are On Parole
- SB 1017, An Act Concerning Election Administration

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